

Sue Bird

— Seattle Storm



Every issue of The Real AAU Basketball is going to feature a brief, five-question profile from successful alumni of AAU basketball programs.

Question No. 1: When & for what team(s) did you play AAU basketball?

Sue Bird: I played for the Liberty Belles in Queens, N.Y. I started the summer after sixth grade and played for 6-7 years.

Question No. 2: What is your best memory of playing AAU ball?

Sue Bird: The traveling was a lot of fun for me. We were pretty successful, so we went to nationals every year and that was a big thing to do. Plus, we had the opportunity to see the country. We played in Salt Lake City, Tennessee and Louisiana...places I never thought I'd have a chance to visit. Also, those nationals provided great competitive memories too because we came in second and third a couple of different years. Playing nationals also gave you attention from colleges and opportunities for scholarships. Of course, most of all, playing with the other girls was one of my best memories. Whenever we see each other, we always talk about the good times we had playing AAU.

Question No. 3: How did playing AAU improve your overall game & ability?

Sue Bird: In AAU tournaments, I played *with* the best players in my area and *against* the best players in other areas. It raises the level of your game by playing the best. And, typically, the best players are led by the best coaches, so you are learning from them as well.

Question No. 4: AAU is more than just playing basketball, it's working together as a team and building camaraderie, what kind of lessons did you learn while involved in AAU that you still carry with you today?

Sue Bird: When you traveled, you were forced to be around each other. You roomed together, rode in the

van, ate meals, etc. You didn't realize it at the time but you learned how to get along with other people and be a good friend to your teammates. I wasn't consciously aware of it at the time but I now realize how important it was to my development.

Question No. 5: How important was the role of the coach to your personal development and team development while in the AAU system?

Sue Bird: My coaches were great. I still take some of the lessons they taught me and apply it to my game today. One of my first memories of AAU was my coach telling me to shoot more. That's something I still struggle with today. There were other things too, like playing tough defense, and simple stuff like catching the ball with two hands. By high school and college, those lessons were engrained in me, so I had an advantage over the other players.

